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|  | **Morning Worship** **September 2020****“Where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them”** |

*We will share the readings and prayers together on Facebook Livestream at 10am on Sunday but we also invite you to use the readings, reflections and prayers as part of a time of contemplation. Find a quiet place to sit inside or outside to do this.*

*We look forward to the time when we will all be back together in person.*

*Ruth, Margaret, Mike and Nigel.*

PRAYER OF APPROACH

Think of the tiny space you occupy right now –

the floor you are standing on, the chair you are sitting on, or the cushion you are kneeling on.
Think of that space in the context of the community you are with right now.
Think of the vastness of earth, of space, of the universe, and beyond.
Now think again of where you are right now,
and let yourself just be in that space, with others in our community present now,

With God.

OPENING PRAYER

**Together we come to worship.
Individuals gathered as one.**

**Together in spirit.
In the name of the Lord.
Amen.**

CONFESSION PRAYER

**Lord God.**

**Forgive us for the times this week when our worldly lives have distracted us from your presence.**

**We pray that in the coming week our minds will be set to the wisdom that you have given us.**

**In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

READING – Romans 13.8-14 New International Version (NIV)

8Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbour as yourself.”[ 10Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

11And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light. 13Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.

READING – Matthew 18.15-20 New International Version (NIV)

15“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ 17If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

18“Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.

19“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.”

REFLECTION

The reading from Matthew appears to be about life and discipline in the church, but if we consider that there was no formal church when Jesus was telling these stories, then clearly ‘church’ doesn’t mean what we take it to mean today. The original Greek text of the Gospel uses the word ekklesia could mean a gathering, an assembly or a community.

As we consider our journey out of lockdown this is an important point for us. What do WE mean when we say ‘church’? Is it the place we go to worship – the building? Is it the people who worship together in our building? Is it a community of people who try to follow Jesus’ example in their daily life? Or something else?

One positive thing that the lockdown has done is to confirm that ‘church’ exists outside the building. Our church building has been closed for worship pretty much for five months. Yet we have still come together each Sunday in worship, prayer and reflection. Throughout this time, people have stayed connected and cared for one another.

What we now see and understand the word ‘church’ to be will influence and shape what we do in the coming weeks and months.

The early church was based on small groups coming together. Throughout Paul’s missionary journeys he formed groups, who gathered together in the name of Christ. Jesus’ message in the reading from Matthew is that even two or three people coming together in his name is a ‘church’.

I think that we can take strength from this. As well as coming together for worship every Sunday, our ‘church’ has always gathered in many smaller groups and shared fellowship at social events. Whilst our Sunday worship and social events are currently restricted, we can gather in small groups – socially distanced of course. Over the coming weeks we can gather together as a ‘church’.

The reading from Romans speaks of discipline in the early church. Think of it as behaviour towards each other, which for Paul the key is love for one for another – the whole basis of our Christian faith. This is something that speaks to our current time when we must show sensitivity to others as we get used to ‘social distancing’ measures and consider how we gather together safely.

This is a time to give thanks for all the groups that meet as part of our ‘church’. A time to pray for guidance as these groups gather again together, with love and fellowship. A time to think of the new groups that may grow from the experience of the last five months and bring a deeper fellowship and wider community. New groups and fresh fellowship that will enrich our ‘church’ and bring everyone closer to God.

THANKSGIVING AND PRAYERS FOR OUR COMMUNITY OF GROUPS

Take a little time to reflect on a group within our church community that you know of or have been part of. Reflect on the value they have given to our whole church community. Pray and give thanks for this group and all groups within our ‘church’.

Spend time to reflect and pray our children, families and schools ministry. Think ahead to Christmas and the support we provide to schools – such as “Journey to Bethlehem”. Pray for how our community of groups can work this year in this vital ministry.

THE LORD’S PRAYER

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.**

**Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours.**

**Now and for ever. Amen**

CLOSING PRAYER

**We are a community – part of a larger community.**

**Let us go out in the name of Christ.**

**With love and compassion for those in need.**

**With grace and understanding towards others.**

**With a yearning to be in your presence and to do your will.**

**Amen.**

THE GRACE

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,**

**And the love of God,**

**And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore.**

**Amen.**